Regional Staff:

Denise Bell, Regional Minister  F Full Time
Richard Williams, Director of New Church and Development  F Part Time
(Position is financed by New Church funds)
Jennifer Saunders, Office Manager  F 2/3rds Time
Betty Brewer-Calvert, Director of Women’s Ministries  F PT Contracted
(Position financed by GA Disciple Women’s Min)
Marilyn Parks and Pam VanDusen Co- Director of Camping Programs
(Position financed by the camping program)
Jackie Byrd, Carrie Norris, Anna Strickland, Co-Youth Directors  Contracted
Tommy Freeman, Camp Manager  PT
(Position financed by Camp usage)

The regional expression of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) is challenging, dynamic and hopefully always evolving to greater ministry across the United States and Canada. The challenges and opportunities direct energies of congregations, clergy, regional ministries, and regional leaders toward a collective offering that pleases God and instigates and results in kingdom-building work. Our hope is that we in Georgia are on an upward trajectory to cultivate vibrant and diverse congregations to make a difference for Christ locally, regionally, and globally.

The highlights of our year include adding additional staff, technical support, seven clergy cluster gatherings, two regional youth events, a mental health resource workshop, a stewardship workshop featuring Bruce Barkhauer from the Center for Faith and Giving, four Boundaries Trainings in partnership with our UCC partners, three women’s events, three men’s events, a SERF leadership gathering and a Train the Trainer event for regional Pro-reconciliation and Anti-racism events. We enjoyed the beginning ministry of five ordinates and two pastoral installations. We started a campus ministry and incubated two new church starts.

The conversation about Pro-reconciliation and Anti-racism continues to evolve in Georgia. We hosted a train the trainer event with eight other regions in the Southeast (SERF), while at the same time four of our Georgia congregations visited the Human Rights Museum, paid for from a Reconciliation Ministries grant. The same four congregations had a fellowship community barbeque to create space to practice the material that the trainers were learning to teach. Teaching and learning is one thing, but the application is everything.

The Christian Church Mental Health Initiative Team (GAMHI) in partnership with the National Benevolent Association (NBA) sponsored a Mental Health Wellness education workshop to educate and inform congregations on the realities of negative mental health and the ways to cultivate positive mental health and wellness. The team created a mental health wellness page on our website http://www.gadisciples.org/georgia-mental-health-initiative.
GAMHI prioritizes mental health and wellness in the life of the region and its local congregations through programming that: 1) Cultivate welcoming, educated, and inclusive congregations by countering stigma of mental illness and raising awareness of mental health. 2) Provide care and support to clergy and seminarians. 3) Provide resources and educational support for Disciples congregations, clergy, seminarians, and community members. 4) Encourage collaboration, sustainability, and innovation of mental health ministries in congregations and the Georgia region.

We are particularly excited about Rev. Richard Williams, who is the new Director of New Church and Church Development. Richard and our New Church and Development team are doing great work. They have facilitated the aspirations of a declining congregation to submit to a self-sacrificing path of new life and vibrancy by investing in a parallel ministry. FCC Warner Robins is now a host to Table Christian Church lead by Rev. Bethany Apelquist. The team has also helped to facilitate a creative partnership with The Disciples Church Extension Fund. One of our congregations painfully concluded that they had come to the end of their physical ministry. However, they believed that God was not through with their legacy. They gave their assets and building to the region. We realized that this was an opportunity for partnership. The collective wisdom of the Georgia Region and The Disciples Extension Fund created the Shiloh Mission and Ministry Center. Through the work of the New Church team, the center currently houses a new DOC church start called Amplify Christian Church lead by Rev. Orlando Scott. The center also houses two unaffiliated congregations. Please pray for Revs. Apelquist and Scott as they began the journey of building strong and vibrant DOC congregations. Celebrating the incubation of two new ministries helped us to release Eagles Landing Christian Church who decided to end its physical ministry.

We tried something new this year with our regional youth program. Typically, the ministry only sponsors the Youth Assembly in South Georgia. We invested a greater stipend and hired a trio leadership team to increase the capacity of the ministry. They launched a successful youth rally, a youth assembly and started a youth ministers' network. In 2020, we will increase the stipend again and look forward to more impactful youth ministry.
We gathered youth leaders at RYA 2019 for a Youth Minister Network meeting and we have created a Youth Ministry Facebook page to connect youth leaders in our region.

Youth Activities Council (YAC) 2019-2020 consists of 12 youth, 6 adult sponsors, 3 Regional Youth Directors, and 3 supporting adult sponsors representing at least 7 Disciples of Christ churches in Georgia. YAC met on June 28-30 at Camp Christian to discuss youth rallies and to begin planning for RYA 2020 which will be Feb 21-23, 2020 at Epworth by the Sea.

In March, women enjoyed two wonderful spring events hosted by Sandersville First Christian Church and Peachtree Christian Church in Atlanta. We explored the theme, “Room at the Table,” through Bible study, workshops, and outstanding keynotes by Rev. Cheryl Cloar and Rev. Lainie Jenkins. Generosity abounded through offerings and outreach items brought for local ministries.

At women’s retreat in September, three excellent keynoters (Revs. Leah Jackson, Jennifer Heinz, and Sylvia Stroy) inspired participants to connect with the theme, “Heart to Heart: Called by Christ to Love.” We had fun celebrating the 145th birthday of Disciples Women with cake and ice cream, laughter-filled games, a photo booth, and a love gift to International Disciples Women’s Ministries. The women exhibited their heart for outreach through items and money given for projects in Georgia and around the world!

Michael Curtis, of Ray of Hope Christian Church was awarded the 2018 Layman of the Year by the Georgia Men’s Commission, Sunday, January 27, 2019. Michael was surprised by the members of the Men’s Commission who attended the worship service, and Roger With, President of the Men’s Commission spoke of Curtis’s qualifications for this honor.

The Georgia Men’s Commission hosted the annual Men’s Retreat at the beautiful Christmount Conference Center in Black Mountain, North Carolina April 5-7, 2019. Roger With, the Men’s Commission President, was joined by the Men’s Commission and gentlemen to worship in song and gain knowledge from the workshop presentations. Men from all over the state of Georgia, and a gentleman from Virginia joined keynote speaker, Rev. Dr. Percy Johnson on workshops on Toxic Masculinity.
On October 5, 2019, the Men’s Commission annual rally was held at Liberty Christian Church, in Newnan, Georgia. The theme was “Rise Up O’ Men of God,” and our keynote speaker was Rev. Richard Williams, of First Christian Church of Lawrenceville. Bob Grant, of First Christian Church of Griffin, led the music and the event was attended by seventeen men who represented seven congregations. The offering taken that day was given to Camp Christian.

Change is always an opportunity for better and deeper expressions of ministry to reach more hearts and lives. Our communications specialist, Buddy Ray, served the region for almost 20 years with excellence and a deep passion for the region. Buddy retired and we are grateful for his service. We believe that God is invested in our ministry and is always making away; hence, the scripture “Be anxious for nothing”. The Lord sent us a gifted Office Manager by the name of Jennifer Saunders. She redesigned and supports our webpage, created new ways for clergy and congregations to get connected, helped us to establish online tools for registrations, and keeps the regional calendar organized and manageable. She supports the regional minister and all regional ministries. Jennifer works with our videography ministry that produces a monthly video to communicate what is happening in the region. Our videographer is Eli White from U-Star Consulting and Services, LLC. Eli volunteers his services monthly and devotes a great deal of time to create a platform to present interactive and engaging ministry. In 2020 our video ministry will travel across the region to capture vibrant ministry and the various expressions of faith in our congregations. Tune in and watch us every month www.gadisciples.org.

Georgia has a small and spread out clergy community. We have approximately 35 full-time and 27 part-time, 15 chaplains, 20 serves in non-ministerial capacities, and 50 active or inactive retired clergy. Attempting to meet the needs of this community has proven to be a challenge. We decided to host seven clergy clusters to hear from this diverse population. The findings from our conversations reminded us of the isolation in ministry, the need to manage time and resources, the desire to participate in vibrant ministry, the desire to grow deeper in spiritual formation, and the need to enjoy the fellowship of family and friends. The plan for 2020 is to host two clergy spiritual retreats and to ensure that each district has an organized clergy fellowship. In 2019 we started a series of Clergy ZOOM meetings that provided information on topics to increase leadership capacity. Topics included the Pension Fund, clergy sabbath, trends in worship, strategies for church transformation, and evangelism.

The regional operating budget every year is supplemented by an annual fund inviting members of the region to gift regional ministry. In the latter part of 2019, we launched an annual fund campaign for 2020 called “20 for 2020”. In 2019 our partnerships allowed us to touch several thousand individuals through events, videos, monthly newsletters, ordinations, anniversaries, workshops, rallies, installations, district meetings, and clergy clusters. Our impact reached 40 congregations through visits from the regional minister, staff, and regional elders. The 20 for 2020 campaign will allow us to touch more people and congregations in 2020 and beyond!
One of the more interesting additions in our 2019 ministry was the use of technology. For example, the region was able to utilize ZOOM software to have real-time multi-participant meetings with regional staff and board members, committees and clergy. We look forward to embracing technology further in engaging with congregations to advance kingdom-building work in Georgia.

What would regional ministry be without camp? Of course, that is a rhetorical question, there is no such thing as regional ministry without camp programs. Our camp program hosted 250 campers and camp counselors. The theme this year was “Peace Works”. For the first time in our camp known history, we had a fully diverse camp. Our campers represented the multicultural expression of the region through our Korean, African American, Euro-American, and Hispanic churches. They were all in the house. Our reconciliation dollars helped us and allowed us to experience “one” church. The children learned scripture and sang songs in languages other than their own!

While our camp program during the summer is encouraging, the camp campus needs new visioning and development. We hope to address this in 2020. The campgrounds and buildings need upgrades and repair. The congregations and individuals who remember the camp in its better days are getting smaller and less able to support the camp. New visioning and resource development beyond maintenance is no longer an optional goal. It is a priority!